



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin

Ranking Member - Helsinki Commission

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding this important hearing today, to discuss government efforts to combat anti-Semitism within the participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Helsinki Commission and its Members have been on the forefront of efforts to move governments and the international community to address anti-Semitic violence that spiked throughout the region in the Spring of 2002. While we have achieved much, I hope to learn today where we should direct our energies next, as the shadow of anti-Semitic hate still darkens many corners of our world.

Considering this reality, I want to highlight the Berlin OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism that shined the light of truth into these dark corners. Chairman Smith and I and many others attended in April, and I honestly believe that our work through the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly created the momentum that moved the Organization to convene this historic and high-level conference. The conference culminated with the Berlin Declaration, given by the Bulgarian Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Solomon Passy. In addition to declaring international events will never justify anti-Semitic acts, the declaration highlighted new commitments obligating all 55 participating States to monitor anti-Semitic crimes and hate crimes. This is a significant step forward, moving the OSCE in a new direction, as OSCE States agreed to track these crimes and forward the information to the ODIHR for compilation.

I want to acknowledge the good work of the U.S. Mission to the OSCE and our ambassador, Stephan Minikes, for his unflagging efforts to make this extraordinary meeting a success. In addition, our German hosts and the Bulgarian Chair were invaluable partners as we pushed for new commitments. Much credit also goes to the NGOs here today, as their tireless work with OSCE governments, including our own, helped build the necessary consensus for the declaration.

However friends, the success of Berlin must not end with the production of this valuable declaration, but rather continue through the fulfillment of the commitments highlighted therein.

While I hope Berlin will open a new chapter in the fight against anti-Semitism in North America and Europe, we must not forget that the primary responsibility to combat anti-Semitism rests first with governments and not the OSCE. ODIHR's role is to be a

clearinghouse and focal point for information, so it is incumbent on participating States to provide protection and vigorous prosecution in matters relating to anti-Semitic violence. Therefore, we must continually work to ensure that the political will is present to denounce acts when they occur and to ensure a proper response by law enforcement.

Concerning ODIHR, we must make certain the Office is properly resourced to fulfill this new and expanded mandate. I understand this is a novel undertaking for ODIHR, so operationalizing these responsibilities will take some time. Yet time is something we cannot waste, as incidents of anti-Semitism must be confronted now.

I am submitting for the record a list that ODIHR circulated highlighting countries who have forwarded information to the Office for compilation. Sadly, less than half of the OSCE membership has so far complied, and some of our closet allies are noticeably absent. The next benchmark of compliance will be the September Brussels Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination. I therefore urge participating States to fulfill their commitments and to provide ODIHR the necessary information and funds, and I also urge ODIHR to expedite its work.

The lack of compliance by participating States raises the question of whether a special high profile position is needed to supplement the work of the ODIHR Director and ODIHR in collecting this information. I note that in our House resolution, Mr. Smith and I urge the Bulgarian Chairman-in-Office, in consultation with the incoming Slovenian Chair, to considering creating a “personal envoy” to interlock and liaise with countries that have not submitted the information or need assistance in creating the necessary mechanisms to track these crimes. Our intent is not to establish a new, permanent bureaucracy, nor is it to take any responsibility from ODIHR, but rather to jump-start these efforts to ensure the collection of accurate data.

In closing, before traveling to Berlin, I made a point visit Auschwitz for the first time. Seeing the remains of that factory of intolerance, hate and death, it reaffirmed how we must continually stress the importance of advancing tolerance throughout the OSCE region. We must assiduously work to prevent future acts of hatred and injustice if we are to one day live in a world free of the toxic waste of anti-Semitism. Consequently, Berlin must be the start of our efforts and not the finish.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.